

The New Earth

Some religious people speculate about what will occur when the world ends and Jesus returns. The apostle Peter gives a vivid description of this event in 2 Peter 3:8-13. He concludes with verse 13: "But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness." What is the *new earth* of which Peter speaks? Is it a literal, material planet inhabited by flesh and blood creatures? Is it a physical place where people live after this age ends? What does the Bible teach?

First, the new earth of which Peter speaks is a figurative description of heaven, the present abode of God. Heaven is described as a house (2 Cor. 5:1), a city (Rev. 22:14; Heb. 11:14), a country (Heb. 11:14-16), and a planet (2 Pet. 3:13). Jesus spoke of the eternal abode of God as a house, and in that house, he spoke of many mansions. Clearly, city, house, and country refer to the same state, heaven. As city, house, and country refer to the same state, also earth, a planet, refers to that state. The new earth is not a literal planet, as some teach, but rather the new earth is one of many figures used to communicate the reality of an eternal dwelling place.

Second, Christians do not center their hope on this earth. God's people "desire a better (country), that is, a heavenly (Heb. 11:16)." Paul said, "Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth (Col. 3:2)."

Third, Jesus made it very clear that our reward is in heaven. He said, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven (Matt. 5:12)." Not only is our reward in heaven, but God is in heaven. We are told, "Glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:16)." In agreement with this, Paul teaches, "If the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens (2 Cor. 5:1)." Therefore, the eternal dwelling place of the redeemed is not on a literal planet earth.

The Bible teaches that God's throne is eternal in the heavens. John recorded, "Straightway I was in the Spirit: and behold, there was a throne set in heaven, and one sitting upon the throne (Rev. 4:2)." His saints will surround that throne forever, "Therefore are they before the throne of God; and they serve him day and night in his temple: . . . They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat: for the Lamb . . . shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them unto fountains of waters of life: and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7:15-17)."